USC Center for Excellence in Teaching

# 5 Tips for supporting and engaging international students

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A list of five detailed tips for addressing the specific needs of students who were not raised in American culture.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Particularly if you have a large proportion of international students in your course, reviewing the tips may help you to identify practices you can implement to avoid problems and/or promote engagement with the international students. For assistance, please [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

### Tip #1: Ask more culturally inclusive questions

Examples:

* What are the laws and policies for this issue in your culture?
* How would this situation play out in your hometown?
* Given how this topic is addressed in your culture, what could the United States/CA learn, or do differently?
* Compare and contrast the way this case would be handled in the United States and other countries.

### Tip #2: Approach opinion questions with care

Examples:

* Turn to a partner and explain your opinion about the topic. After 2 minutes, be ready to share with the class.
  + Speaking with a peer first often reduces the affective filter and allows students to ask about the directions and prepare an answer.
* Take 1 minute to write down what you think about the issue. Be ready to share what you wrote with the class.
  + Writing is often easier than spontaneous speaking, and being able to read a prepared comment can reduce anxiety.
* This is a controversial issue and people have different opinions about it. In the U.S. education system, we expect and admire the expression of differences of opinion. You do not have to agree with your professor or your peers. Write your opinion on a piece of paper, do not write your name, fold it up and pass it forward for your professor to share with the class.
  + Explaining the U.S. education system and U.S. culture’s acceptance of, and admiration for, personal expression is important for students who may have never been asked their opinion, allowed to voice it, or allowed to disagree with a professor.

### Tip #3: Limit use of questions where students could “lose face”

* In some cultures, the idea of losing face by making or admitting mistakes or deficiencies could bring public shame not only to the individual, but also to his/her family.

Examples NOT to use:

* Does everyone understand?
* Are there any questions?
* Which concepts were unclear?
* Did you do the reading?
* Which part confused you?

### Tip #4: Explain and uphold USC’s academic integrity policies

* Require APA style. Provide links to APA support resources like the Purdue OWL.
  + Citations and references could be completely foreign to students from cultures who don’t require them, even in academic or professional writing. Additionally, telling an author’s first name from last name for citation purposes is often challenging when given and family names are reversed in a student’s culture.
* Use Turnitin to check for plagiarism. Explain what plagiarism is and how Turnitin works.
  + In many cultures, it is considered an honor to copy the words of an expert since it is felt a non-expert could never say the same thing as well. Additionally, challenges with the English language often make paraphrasing difficult and inaccurate, potentially leading to plagiarism.
* Encourage students to visit USC’s Writing Center or a tutor.
  + Students whose native language is not English may be unfamiliar with U.S. graduate-level style writing and formatting requirements and may benefit from assistance with editing for grammar and mechanics.

### Tip #5: Set clear group work expectations

* Have groups assign roles/responsibilities, meeting times, and deadlines.
  + Students may not be used to taking responsibility for group work expected outside of class. Group work, if done at all, would be done during class time in their cultures and likely supervised by the instructor.
* Explain peer assessment when each group member needs to evaluate or report contributions of others.
  + Since assessing peers is an opportunity that could lead to a friend losing face, honest and constructive peer feedback should be explained as a valued, necessary requirement. Students should be directly told that in U.S. culture, offering only positive comments and awarding perfect scores to classmates is not the goal, nor is helpful for their improvement/success.